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## In Memoriam: Kimberly G. Smith, 1948-2018


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## In Memoriam: Kimberly G. Smith, 1948-2018



Kimberly Gray Smith, Historian and Executive Committee member of the Arkansas Academy of Science, and a doyen among Arkansas educators, passed away suddenly on April 9, 2018, at his home in Fayetteville, Arkansas. Kim was a community ecologist *par excellence*, and to the legions of his friends, students, and colleagues, the loss of his warm-hearted *persona* and his inspiring mentorship leaves a painful void. Few people mastered so many diverse areas of biology and natural history as Kim did. Birds, bugs, bears, he studied them all, with an insatiable curiosity and inspiring intellect honed by over three decades of nurturing a bevy of students toward productive research and teaching careers. A keen historian who loved to lecture and write on history of ecological thought, Kim clearly became a top ecologist by scrutinizing and emulating the careers of past star performers in ecology.

Born July 19, 1948, in Manchester, Connecticut, to Robert H. and Janet (Simon) Smith, Kim was third of five children. His interest in nature was sparked by his grandfather at an early age, but his passions have always been diverse. At Tufts University (B.S., 1971), he dabbled in lacrosse, swimming, and squash. The ornithology class he took with Herman Sweet in 1969 set him on the path toward a lifetime of studying birds. In August of 1969, he was the first intern at Manomet

Bird Observatory, Massachusetts. He was especially adept at shorebird identification. Soon thereafter, Kim was leading bird tours on Cape Cod. Later (with RK), he continued to lead bird tours to the American tropics with profits to support the Arkansas Audubon Society Trust.

Kim came to the University of Arkansas in 1972 for his M.S. degree (1975), under Douglas A. James. Doug, and his then wife Frances “Fran” James, nurtured Kim as he elevated his life-long love of ecology into a solid academic career. Fran became a professional mentor to him and that bond lasted through his career. He said that he never made a major, professional decision without first discussing it with her. Kim was particularly capable in the developing field of multivariate analysis as applied to ecological systems. His M.S. work on summer vertical distribution of birds along the Ozark slopes led to his first paper, which appeared in *Ecology* (58:810-819, 1977), propelling him down the path to scientific acclaim.

Kim received his Ph.D. (1982) from Utah State University under James A. MacMahon, studying avian resource partitioning along a montane sere. Kim also was deeply involved in the initial studies about the ecological effects from Mount St. Helens eruption. After a brief stint as a post-doctoral research ecologist (1980-81) at the Bodega Marine Lab, University of California, Berkeley, he joined the University of Arkansas as an Assistant Professor in 1981, climbing up the ranks until his impending retirement 36 years later in 2018 as Distinguished Professor of Biological Sciences.

In his nearly four decades in Arkansas, Kim was a committed educator and nurtured students at various stages of career preparation and development. He treated his students like family, always including them, whether in professional or personal get-togethers--the more, the merrier! Altogether, Kim mentored 17 Undergraduate Honors, 29 M.S., 21 Ph.D., and 8 post-doctoral students. His research was funded in part by 29 major (>\$20,000) grant awards, including 4 from the National Science Foundation. He served as Chair of the Department of Biology at the University of Arkansas, Fayetteville, between 2004 and 2008. When asked to describe Kim’s leadership style, one professor described his tenure as department chair as a “return to Camelot.” Kim was a Charles Bullard Fellow at Harvard University in 2001-2002.

A prolific writer, Kim authored or co-authored nearly 100 refereed journal articles, and remained active

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in writing till the end, including the three papers in this issue of the Journal. His papers reflect his remarkably eclectic interests. His notable contributions to avian community ecology include providing insights into community structure and energetics of avian assemblages along a montane sere, and effects of drought, prescribed burns, and tornado damage on community structure. His work on emergence of 13-year periodical cicadas in northwest Arkansas and how predator satiation leads to safety in numbers (Ecology, 1993) is a classic, featured in a leading Ecology textbook (*Ecology: Concepts and Applications*, by M. C. Molles, 4<sup>th</sup> ed.). His interest in avian breeding biology is evident from his publications on Dark-eyed Junco, Hooded Warbler, Jabiru, Resplendent Quetzal, and Wedge-billed Woodcreeper, from areas as far flung as montane Utah (United States) and cloud forests of Costa Rica, to the rainforests of Ecuador and marshes of Belize. His works on migration and habitat occupancy covered Blue Jays, Shorebirds, raptors, Rusty Blackbirds, and Saw-whet Owls. Kim even penned numerous popular articles. He wrote 41 symposium proceeding articles and book chapters.

A versatile ecologist, Kim was as comfortable with plants, arthropods, and mammals, as he was with birds. His interests ranged the gamut from conservation biology and plant-animal relationships, to gypsy moths, austral migration, and vertebrate breeding ecology and habitat selection. His forays into mammalogy ranged from studying small terrestrial mammals, southern flying squirrels, and elk in Arkansas, to documenting the current status of mammals in South Korea. He teamed with molecular biologists and micro-anatomists to publish on genetic variation and ultrastructure of teeth in black bears. He also spear-headed and documented the successful translocation of black bears in Arkansas—the most successful reintroduction of a bear in the world (Journal of Mammalogy, 1994). He followed it up by documenting the subsequent damage caused by the bears and their influence on land-owner attitudes. His work and participation as an *ex-officio* member of the Arkansas Game and Fish Commission (2004-2008) helped pave the way for improved bear management regulations. Ever the mega-data enthusiast, he brought-together disparate disciplines in population ecology, geographic distribution, and habitat. His contributions to the Arkansas Breeding Birds Atlas <http://birdatlas.cast.uark.edu/> provide a template for further planning and protection.

Kim displayed a particularly sharp memory for the when, where, and what, concerning key events, places, and players in ecology. Beginning in 2001, he wrote a

series of fascinating, quarterly columns titled “100 years ago in the American Ornithologists’ Union” in the Auk (Vol. 118 to present) about the history of the AOU. These immensely readable articles chronicled the history of ornithological thought over the century. Kim brought these global, ecological perspectives to his work—and his life—applying those experiences as an Arkansan naturalist. His passion for history of ecology in Arkansas is evident by his thorough and meticulously researched writings on the subject, e.g., Friedrich Gerstaecker’s observations in 1838-1842 (Arkansas Historical Quarterly, 2014), and the history of Saw-whet Owls (Journal of the Arkansas Academy of Science, 2016). He authored numerous small notes from his local studies. His classes instilled the same passion for ecological history into his students, who were often given assignments that asked them to contextualize a discovery in the prevailing scientific thought of the time. He occasionally rented a spare bedroom in his home to struggling graduate students. It was common for Kim to “pepper” those students with questions about ecological history on their way to their first cup of coffee in the morning.

Kim was elected Fellow of the American Ornithologists’ Union (AOU, now American Ornithological Society) and American Association for Advancement in Science in 1991. For his service as Editor-in-Chief of The Auk, and for his historical columns, he was awarded the Marion Jenkins AOU Service Award in 2005. He also served as Associate Editor for Southwestern Naturalist (1990-1994) and Ecology and Ecological Monographs (1996-1999), and Book Editor for The Condor (1995-2000). At the University of Arkansas, he won a number of awards over the years, and achieved Distinguished Professor status in 2015.

Kim freely allocated his time to educating birders and mentoring novices. He moderated the popular ARBIRD-L, the Birds of Arkansas Discussion List which is used daily by bird enthusiasts to discuss bird sightings. He also facilitated another listserv for the Department of Defense, the Partners-in-Flight, which pertains to military operations across the globe. His expertise was invaluable to this community of birders seeking a scientific or historical perspective to their conservation activities. Kim served in the Arkansas Audubon Society Trust 1983-88, serving as Chair from 1986. Always the gregarious extrovert, he often jumped at the chance to host field data gathering events, and for many years led Christmas Bird Counts, Breeding Bird Surveys, and Shorebird surveys. He had a particular penchant for departmental parties or mixers in

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professional meetings, where he synergistically gained intellectual stimulation from rubbing shoulders with like-minded colleagues.

Kim was known for his impish sense of humor and benign sarcasm, often doled out with a beaming smile and a sparkle in his eyes. Once, when he walked in on a group of unsuspecting students in lab playing softball with a wad of paper and umbrella, he set his notes down, grabbed the umbrella from a student's hand, and said, "I call second base." He was a great husband, father, mentor, confidant, and friend. Four days before his death, he presented a retirement seminar in the Department of Biological Sciences. He entertained a packed room with an often humorous summary of his life and career, "Life in the Fast Lane: My Life as a Community Ecologist." He ended with some advice to younger colleagues: "Be curious, be creative, challenge yourself to learn new things, learn the history of things that interest you, take students on field trips, take students abroad," and finally, "have fun doing what you do ... I did ..."

Kim is survived by his beloved wife of 45 years, Peggy, their daughter Mallory and her husband Sheldon Steinert, and four grandchildren, Erowyn, Simon, Laura, and Kara.

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